

## **The Depth of Your Debt is the Depth of Your Forgiveness**

INI

Grace and peace to you, who have been washed, who have been sanctified, who have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. We pray, O Holy Spirit, search all things and reveal to us the deep things of God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. Amen.

### **Matthew 18:21–35**

*<sup>21</sup> Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*

*<sup>22</sup> Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*

*<sup>23</sup> Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. <sup>26</sup> The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ <sup>27</sup> Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

*<sup>28</sup> “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’*

*<sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ <sup>30</sup> And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. <sup>32</sup> Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me.*

*<sup>33</sup> Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’*

*<sup>34</sup> And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.*

*<sup>35</sup> “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”*

The Depth of Your Debt is the Depth of Your Forgiveness

1. Your debt toward God is deep, but His forgiveness is deeper
2. Your forgiveness toward others is deep because of the depth of God’s forgiveness toward you

In the name of Jesus, our Lord and King, dear fellow servants of God,

We live in a world where nothing is free. We live in a world of obligations. We live in a world where we expect people to pay what they owe.

We live in a world where a little girl has to pay for what she has broken. A woman told me the story. Her sister owned an antique china shop. It was tough running a small business like this, and each week was a struggle to make ends meet. One day, a mother came into the shop with her little three year old daughter. As you might imagine, this was not a wise idea. It wasn't long before that little girl got curious and ... CRASH! A \$350 antique vase was now nothing more than a pile of broken glass.

In a small business like this, \$350 was a lot of money. The store owner just couldn't afford to throw away a \$350 vase. So she told the mother that she had to figure out a way to pay for what was broken.

We live in a world where nothing is free, because we expect people to pay what they owe.

But what if it were something even more expensive? What if it something even more precious than that vase were broken? What if it was your trust that was shattered? What if it was your reputation that was broken? What if it was your future that was ruined? What if it was your three year old daughter that was hurt? And what if this was done over and over and over and over and over and over ...? Now we are dealing with much more precious things, for these matters of the heart belong to the kingdom of God.

In the kingdom of God things are different. Well, not totally, someone still has to pay. Someone has to pay. But who? Well, in the kingdom of God, things are reversed. We live in a kingdom where the store owner pays the price, not the girl; where the king pays the price not the servant; where forgiveness reigns – a letting go, a release, a freeing of the debt that is owed to you. We live in a kingdom where everything is free, but only because someone was willing to pay the price.

How many times, Lord? Seven? But no, seventy times seven. More than could or should be counted. The depth of your debt is the depth of your forgiveness.

**1. Your debt toward God is deep, but His forgiveness is deeper**

God must settle accounts. He has been patient, watching these little children prance around his shop, disrespect his most sacred things, and leaving behind nothing more than a pile of broken glass. He has been patient, waiting, watching, but eventually, for every single person, there comes a time when he calls everyone to give an account of themselves – and the depth of the debt is deep.

A talent is a measure of weight. It measures value of silver or gold in terms of weight. One talent amounts to about 6000 denarii in Jesus' day. And a denarii was a day's wage. So one talent amounts to 6000 day's work. And the servant owed 10,000 talents.

Over the years it adds up. Think of how the debt was accumulating for Joseph's brothers. Genesis chapters 37 – 50 recount the story.

They looked with disdain on his new coat. Joseph had been given a special coat from his father – a coat that signified his father's favor toward Joseph. This coat also signified a place of prominence in the family inheritance. When you have 11 brothers with which to share the inheritance, that can be a pretty big deal. The brothers thought they deserved better. Their father owed them something better.

Jealousy grew and grew, until they secretly devised a plan to be rid of Joseph. They see a band of Midianite slave-traders traveling by on their way to Egypt. This is their chance. They barter a deal and send Joseph, bound hand and foot to Egypt where he would eventually end up in an Egyptian prison. They tear up his coat, cover it with blood, and tell their father that Joseph was killed by a wild beast. For the next two years Joseph would rot behind bars in an Egyptian prison cell.

It all adds up. How many times have we been driven by jealousy? By anger? By the feeling that we deserve something better; that someone owes us. We get jealous of those who seem to get all the attention, while we are left all alone; they've done something to hurt us and don't seem to care; they've robbed us of something we deserve; they've cut into the money we are owed or the credit we deserve; so we become spiteful; angry at God; and we plan our vengeance; we think of ways to hurt them back; we want to settle accounts and to tear their coat to shreds.

It adds up. Year after year; day after day; moment after moment where we have not acted as a servant of the Lord should act; every second where our heart was not fully and in every way dedicated to the service of the Lord and his commandments ... every second we've held a grudge ... every time we've gossiped ... every moment of greed ... every word we've spoken that we shouldn't have ... every thought we've had that we shouldn't ...

It adds up, until we must agree with the psalmist: *Psalm 130:3 If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?*

The accounts must be settled and 10,000 talents is the weight of the debt. That is to say, the servant owes his master, 60 million denarii; that is to say, the servant owes his Lord 164,383 years of wages; if he were to work every single day with no days off, it would take over 1000 lifetimes to pay it off. That is to say, our debt can never be repaid by our works. And without repayment, we must be cast out of the king's presence; me, my wife, my family – the accounts must be settled.

This is what shape the posture of our worship.

There is nothing left for us to do but fall before our Lord's feet. We bows down to the dust and beg the master for time, for mercy, for some way to make things right. In a world where nothing is free; it is no surprise that the servant's natural thinking is to find a way to repay his Lord. Of course, an eternity would not be enough time to repay this debt; for it is deeply spiritual and requires a pure heart of us and God knows this.

But we live in a kingdom which is unlike the world. This kingdom is different. We live in a kingdom where everything is free; of course this is only because someone else was willing to pay the price.

v.27, "And the Lord was moved with compassion, he released him, and he forgave the debt."

God was willing to swallow the debt entirely. So deep is his compassion; so deep is his forgiveness. He was willing to pay the guilt price himself, to take it on himself, to take the debt which was yours and to be forsaken, sold off, cast out, and given to the torturers. So deep is His love.

"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of eternal life is Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6)

"Where sin abounded, grace did abound much more." (Romans 6)

On the cross, Jesus paid the price of your sins, every second of every life; he took the debt.

"He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:19)

In one swift declaration, the Lord of all glory, has cast your sins into the depths of the sea, into the deepest waters, into the depths of holy baptism. For you are buried with Christ in baptism, and are raised in the likeness of His resurrection. He has cast your debt into the waters of baptism and brought forth something new; something cleansed, something free, because he has paid the price to make you his own.

*Psalm 103:1,10–12 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name! Bless the LORD O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

However deep your debt, so deep is God's forgiveness; and so deeply has he loved you.

## **2. Your forgiveness toward others is deep because of the depth of God's forgiveness toward you**

But we still live in a world where nothing is free; where the girl breaks the antique vase and must pay the price. As we consider how other people have sinned against us, we are still tempted to expect repayment. We are tempted to grab that little girl by the throat and not let go until we feel things have been made right. We are tempted to bring the ways of the world into the kingdom of God, into our marriages and parenting, into our families and churches. We are tempted to think in terms of the depth of is owed to me – But this is not how the kingdom of God works.

v.28, "So when that servant had gone out, he found his fellow servant who owed him 100 days wages. He took him by the throat and said: 'Pay what you owe me!' And even though this servant begged for patience, and promised to repay him, he would not have it; and he cast him into prison."

The Lord had forgiven him over 1000 life times of debt, and he was not willing to forgive or have patience for just 100 days worth. So soon had he forgotten the Lord's benefits. So soon had he forgotten the depth of the Lord's forgiveness. And so soon did he sin against God's grace.

We are not in an earthly china shop. These are not the dealings of the world where nothing is free. And we are dealing with something much more expensive than a vase. We are dealing with the gracious rule of God's grace. As we deal with our fellow Christians we are dealing with the realm of God's grace – in our relationships, in our

marriages, in our churches – His kingdom rules with grace. And to persistently sin against God's grace is to be separated from God's kingdom. It angers God to the point where he throws this servant to the torture of hell. And that is a debt that can never be repaid. And Jesus says, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

We live in a kingdom where everything is free. Not that it comes at no cost, but because someone else is willing to pay that price. And the person who ends up paying the cost is you. When you forgive someone who has hurt you, who has done something against you, you are paying their debt off; you are letting go of the sin and not demanding repayment. That comes at a great cost sometimes; it is such a great cost that it kills us. Our sinful nature wants revenge, payback, what is owed. And to forgive is to put our sinful nature to death, so that God gives birth to something new, something like Him, something created according to God. Such love is a product of God's kingdom.

Your forgiveness toward others is deep because of the depth of God's forgiveness toward you.

This gives birth to a depth of patience, as you wait for the right time to address the subject with a fellow Christian. We don't ignore it, but we also remember that in the end, God will settle accounts, not us.

This gives birth to a depth of gratitude, as you recall the depth of God's forgiveness toward you. Only by embracing the depth of Your Lord's compassion can the Holy Spirit work such a depth of love for those who sin against us. Only by the Holy Spirit can we find the love to release; to free other from any obligation; from any guilt; from any future due date.

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It all adds up. Cast out of the family; sold into slavery; left for dead; two years in an Egyptian prison – finally Joseph would get his chance for repayment. Joseph's 11 brothers look on wondering what he will do. 22 eyes stare at him, their futures in his hands.

You see, by God's grace, Joseph had found his way out of prison and into the good favor of Pharaoh the king of Egypt. In fact, he became so well liked and trusted by Pharaoh that Joseph ended up being appointed second most powerful ruler in all of Egypt.

It just so happened that there was a famine in his homeland which forced his brothers to come Egypt looking for supplies. This brought them squarely before the one whom they left for dead. 22 eyes look on him who has all the power in Egypt to do with them as he wishes.

So they say among themselves, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us and repay us for all the evil which we did to him." There is nothing more to do than to fall to their faces before their brother.

But in the kingdom of God things are different. In the kingdom of God, everything is free, because Joseph is willing to cancel the debt.

"Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

Who do you have a chance to release? Who is the fellow servant that is indebted to you? If your brother sin against you 490 times, forgive him. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." (Matthew 6:14)

We live in a kingdom where everything is free because someone was willing to pay the price.

As children of God we've all been in that precious china shop; we've all been curious, distracted, disrespectful of God's things; and we've shattered what is precious to him: shattered relationships, broken hearts, obligations we've held over people's heads.

But here we take the posture of a servant; here we bow in worship and beg for mercy. And what does our Father say?

He pays the price in Christ, he cleans up the mess with His Spirit, and says: "The depth of your debt is the depth of my forgiveness."

*Psalm 103:1,12-13 Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name! Bless the LORD O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. ... As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.*

Lord, forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Amen.