

Sunday Sermon – 2015-08-16 – 11th Matthew (18:23-35) – Forgive 70 x 7

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Earlier this week, Brevard County's children went back to school. For that reason, I'd like to help you all with some math problems. Just before Jesus shares the parable in today's Gospel, St. Peter asks Him, "*How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?*" What does Jesus say to him? (Pause) Yes 70 times 7. How much is that?: 490 times. In the spiritual mathematics book we call the Bible, for all intents and purposes, that is a number approaching infinity?

In today's Gospel, The King forgives a servant an impossible sum. 10,000 talents is the equivalent of 150,000 years' wages. The average wage for an unskilled laborer in America is roughly \$40,000 in today's US Dollars. In today's currency, 10,000 talents would be \$6,000,000,000 -- that's billion with a Capital "B". How many of us realistically expect to make that much in a lifetime? As I said, this was an impossible sum of money for an individual to pay back.

So he's forgiven this impossible sum of money and what does he do? He comes across a fellow servant who owes him some money – a hundred denarii. A denarius was a day's wage. Using the same \$40,000 a year salary, this comes to just over \$10,000. Now if someone owed me \$10,000, I would be very anxious about them paying me back. I would be tempted to get ugly with them if I thought it would help motivate them to pay me back. Having said that, if I had just been forgiven a debt of 6 billion dollars, I would certainly count my blessings and seek to pay it forward. \$10,000 – forget about it friend, let's call it even. Just pay it forward to someone else.

I can't tell you the number of times someone has confessed to me that they are having a hard time forgiving someone else. I often remind them of today's Gospel reading as well as the original Greek of the Lord's Prayer – forgive us our debts of sin as we forgive those who have debts of sin against us. If we want to enable God to forgive us, we need to be merciful and forgive others. It doesn't matter how much we've fasted and prayed, how many charities or churches we've supported in this lifetime. If we have not shown mercy and forgiveness to all others, we disable God from forgiving us our sins, however many or few they may be. We are all sinners condemned to eternal

judgment. It is only by the mercy and forgiveness of God, granted to us through the self-sacrifice and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we can be forgiven this Great-Wall-of-China-sized debt of sin.

St. James in his Epistle makes this very clear. *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment, is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”* (James 2:10-13)

Next time you find yourself having a hard time forgiving someone else, remember that God has forgiven you your completely insurmountable debt of sin. It is like the Great Wall of China separating you from God and His mercy. If you are unable or unwilling to forgive your neighbor, then you better make sure there's enough money in your eternal portfolio to pay your insurmountable air-conditioning bill. An infinite bill will take longer than infinity to pay off. Only God in His Great mercy can do that for you.

You cannot possibly buy your way into heaven. Salvation is a free gift that must be received. Having been forgiven by God however, we must then extend that forgiveness to others. Without God, all our good works are multiplied by zero, they are of no benefit. With God, all our good works are multiplied a hundredfold. Forgive in the same way you want to be forgiven. Forgive so that you can be forgiven.

I really want to bring this home for you. Close your eyes if you would. Picture yourself at your funeral. Now picture yourself being able to see all the people who came to your funeral and how they would feel about you. Think about those who died before you or who might still be alive who would not have come to your funeral. Look back on your life. Are there still grudges you are holding on to that you have not yet resolved? I don't know when your funeral will be but I do know that you need to forgive all your fellow servants before you pass from this life IF you want to get into heaven. If you are still having a hard time forgiving others, ask God to help you forgive...before your time is up.

To God be the glory, now and forever and to the ages of ages, Amen.