

## **THE UNMERCIFUL SLAVE: MAT 18:21-35**

### **VOCAB WORDS:**

1. Talents: This is a form of money. It is a very large amount of money. We will imagine one talent to equal \$100.
2. Denarii: This is a form of money. This is a very small amount of money. We will imagine it equaling one penny.

### **THE CONTEXT: MAT 18:21-22**

What two people are talking? What was the question asked? What was the response?

Peter is asking Jesus a question. Peter asked how many times he was supposed to forgive his brother. He suggested seven times. Peter probably thought this was a lot of times to forgive. Imagine forgiving your friend seven times for the same sin. That would quickly get old. Jesus responds with seventy times seven. Is Jesus teaching that we need to forgive 490 times, but not 491 times? Not likely. Jesus is simply using this figure to show us that we forgive many, many times. If Peter would have suggested eight times, I imagine Jesus responding with “eighty times eight”. What would you guess this coming parable to be about? Probably forgiveness, right? Let’s see.

### **THE PARABLE: MAT 18:23-34**

What are the main characters in this parable? What is their relation to each other? What goes on between them?

There are three main characters in this parable. This parable focuses on a king and two of his slaves. The king rules over his slaves, and the slaves owe him money. The first slave owed the king 10,000 talents. We will imagine this as \$1,000,000. We will name this slave Mean Matt. The other slave owes Mean Matt 100 denarii. We will imagine this as \$1. We will name this slave Poor Pete. It is important to see that the king rules over all the slaves with authority, and all the slaves are equal to each other.

What is the pattern in this parable? What are the variables in the pattern?

The pattern is somebody owing someone else money. The debtor begs that the debt be forgiven. The variables in the pattern are the size of the debt, and whether the debtor is forgiven or not.

What does the king want to do? Can Mean Matt pay his debt? What was the threat? What does Mean Matt do? What was the result?

The king “wishes to settle accounts with his slaves.” This means that his slaves owed him money, and he wanted them to pay. Mean Matt owed the king \$1,000,000. Mean Matt was unable to pay. This figure is supposed to suggest a debt so large that it is impossible to pay. The king threatens to sell all of Mean Matt’s possessions and sell him and his family into slavery. Also, the king still expected Mean Matt to pay his debt. Will Mean Matt be able to pay his debt while in slavery? Not likely. This is supposed to suggest a life long punishment as a result of his debt. Poor guy. What does Mean Matt do? What any desperate person would do. He begs the king. He begs that the king allow him more time to pay off his debt. What is the result? The king forgives the Mean Matt of the debt. Forgiving the debt doesn’t mean that the king allowed him more time to pay the debt. It simply means that he completely removed the debt. Mean Matt doesn’t need to pay anymore. Hurrah! Why did the king do this? Because the king had mercy. Did Mean Matt do anything worthy of \$1,000,000? No. Mean Matt just begged. Mercy is forgiving someone who is unworthy of forgiveness. The king had compassion, and was merciful.

What does Mean Matt do next? How much did Poor Pete owe Mean Matt? Was Poor Pete able to pay? What did Poor Pete do? What was the result?

Mean Matt immediately goes out to find his fellow slave, Poor Pete. Poor Pete owed him one denarii (\$1), and Mean Matt wanted Poor Pete to pay it. Remember, Mean Matt no longer needs to pay his debt. Essentially, Mean Matt won the \$1,000,000 lottery that day, and now he is hitting the streets trying to get more money from people that owe him. Poor Pete is unable to pay. So Poor Pete does what any desperate person does. He begs. Does this sound familiar? What was the result of Poor Pete's begging? Nada. Mean Matt throws Poor Pete in prison, and expects him to pay. Can Poor Pete make money to pay his debt while in prison? Not likely.

What happens next? What does the king say to Mean Matt? What did the king expect Mean Matt to do? What did the king do?

When Poor Pete's fellow slaves see this injustice, they tell the king. The king first calls Mean Matt a "wicked slave", and then recalls that he already forgave Mean Matt of the debt. The king expected Mean Matt to be equally forgiving. The king is "moved with anger." Why is the king so angry? Mean Matt was cruel to Poor Pete. Mean Matt didn't do anything cruel to the king? The king was angry because how ungrateful Mean Matt was of the amazing forgiveness the king had on him. Mean Matt was cruel to the king because of his ingratitude. The king sends Mean Matt to be tortured until he pays off the debt. Will Mean Matt ever be able to pay the debt while being tortured? I think you get the point.

**THE LESSON:** "my heavenly father will do the same to you if you do not forgive his brother from your heart."

The moral is that God will send us to be tortured, if we do not forgive our brothers. How do we need to forgive our brothers? From the heart. The forgiveness needs to be genuine.

**THE EXPLANATION:**

This parable is fairly clear without an explanation, but some discussion and insight can help make the message even stronger.

Who do the characters represent? What is their relationship to each other?

The king represents God. The slaves represent people. The king rules over all the slaves, and all the slaves owe the king money. What is the relationship between the slaves? All the slaves are equal. They are all under the king, and they all owe the king money. Some of the slaves owe each other money as well, but they are still equally under the rule of the king. God rules over all people. We are all in debt to God. We are all equal under God, but we are also in debt to each other.

What does Mean Matt's debt represent? What does the king's threat represent? What does the King's forgiveness represent?

Mean Matt's debt represents the debt of sin. This debt is represented by a huge number to tell us that there is no way we can pay this debt ourselves. Rom 6:23 tells us that the cost of sin is death. The threat of Mean Matt being sold into slavery represents that we will all die because of our sin/debt. Unless our debt of sin is paid, we will all be punished. The king's mercy represents God being merciful to us. There is nothing we can do to pay for our sin, but God is merciful to forgive this debt. We no longer need to pay for our debt with our death.

This parable does not address it, but the debt is paid by the death of Jesus. God is truly merciful. Not only does he forgive our debt; He pays it Himself by the death of His only son (John 3:16)

What does Poor Pete's debt represent? What do Mean Matt's actions represent?

Poor Pete's debt to Mean Matt represent our sins or wrong doings to each other. Why is this debt represented by such a small number? When someone has done me wrong, their debt is so insignificant compared to my debt to God. The sins against each other are serious, but compared to our own sins to God they are so minor. Mean Matt's merciless actions represent his inability to forgive his brother.

What does the king's final judgment represent?

When the king learns that Mean Matt won't forgive Poor Pete, he is filled with anger and resentment. He eternally punishes Mean Matt. This represents God's frustration towards us when we refuse to forgive each other. It represents that we will be eternally punished if we won't forgive each other.

#### **THE APPLICATION:**

In the world's eyes, I shouldn't forgive someone who has sinned against me, unless if I want to. If someone has sinned against me seven times, it's not likely that I will want to forgive them again. This makes sense to the world. That person has wronged me too many times. I don't need to forgive them. This parable teaches us that we can't deny anyone forgiveness.

It makes sense in God's eyes that we need to forgive everyone no matter what. It will be difficult to forgive a drunk driver that kills one of your family members, but remember that God forgave the sinners that killed His son. It is mandatory that we always forgive anyone, because we have already been forgiven of our immense debts to God. God has already forgiven you more than you can ever forgive anyone else. We need to know that anytime we don't forgive each other, we are showing God ingratitude of His forgiveness of us. Let us always keep this perspective in life, and continually be willing to forgive each other.