

Jesus' Parables in Chronological Order

Parable #22 — Luke 17:7-10 — Master and Servant

⁷“Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, ‘Come along now and sit down to eat’? ⁸ Would he not rather say, ‘Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink’? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.’”

Parable #23 — Matthew 18:23-34 — Unmerciful Servant

²³“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

³⁰“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³²“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Parable #22 — Luke 17:7-10 — Master and Servant

1. The original Greek word for the man working for his master is *doulos*. Do you know what that means? (17:7)
2. Was it fair for the master to expect his servant would prepare his meal after laboring in the fields all day?
3. Has society shifted on obeying authority and doing ones duty? Has God?
4. Should the master be expected to thank his servant for doing what he was told (or ordered or commanded) to do, for doing his duty? Should we expect thanks from God for obeying him and doing what he tells us to do? Doesn't our piety (being devout or reverent) earn us some special treatment?

Parable #23 — Matthew 18:23-34 — Unmerciful Servant

1. Jesus told the parable of the unmerciful (unforgiving) servant right after telling Peter he must forgive someone seventy-seven (or seventy times seven) times. How likely are we to forgive someone many times for a similar offense?
2. Why is an unforgiving spirit so deadly?
3. What is the only supplication (request) in the Lord's prayer that has a "catch" to it (that requires something of us)? (Matthew 6:12-15, Mark 11:25-26)
4. In today's terms, roughly how much did the first servant owe the king? How much did the second servant owe the first?
5. In what ways has God shown mercy in forgiving your sins?
6. If God is so willing to forgive us, why are we often unwilling to forgive others? Why is there such an attraction to revenge movies like *Death Wish*, *Straw Dogs*, *Payback*, and *Point Blank*?
7. Is it really possible to "forgive and forget?" How is it possible to forget the wrongs that others have done to us?
8. What happened to the servant who was unforgiving? What is the parallel meaning for us today?

Parable #22 — Luke 17:7-10 — Master and Servant — Leader's Notes

1. The original Greek word for the man working for his master is *doulos*. Do you know what that means?

Many Bibles translate the Greek *doulos* as “servant,” but the word used in this passage describes a slave, probably the only slave of a small farmer, a slave who not only works in the field, but also performs household chores. To Jews in the First Century Roman empire, slavery was a fact of life. The average person didn't own slaves, but many villages would have one or more wealthy people who owned slaves. In those days, slaves did not just have servile duties. Some might be tutors, physicians, companions, household managers, sales agents, and administrators. But the slave Jesus describes in this brief parable, probably the only slave in this household, got mostly hard labor—plowing, looking after livestock, as well as cooking and household chores. His was a pretty hard existence.

2. Was it fair for the master to expect his servant would prepare his meal after laboring in the fields all day?

The point here is that, fair or not, the slave was expected to work in the fields *and* fix the food. That was his duty. I have a contractor friend who on occasion demands that his crews work into the wee hours of the morning to get an office ready for a client. That's part of the job; it comes with the territory. And though my friend's workers don't especially like it, they do it because it is required. People in our culture work two or three jobs because they *have to*. Is it fair? No. But it's required by the responsibilities they have.

3. Has society shifted on obeying authority and doing ones duty? Has God?

Yes. Here's an example. As recently as the 60's, the Girl Scout Pledge read, “On my honor, I will try to *do my duty* to God and my country, to help other people at all times, and to *obey* the Girl Scout law.” But times have changed, and the words “duty” and “obey” have been changed. Now Girl Scouts recite, “On my honor, I will try: to *serve* God* and my country, to help people at all times, and to *live by* the Girl Scout Law.”

No, the meaning hasn't changed that much, but it is softer. When we drop the ideas of “duty” and “obedience” from our relationship with God, however, we miss one of the essential components of true discipleship. To be real disciples we must be obedient to God's word and do our duty as followers of Jesus in a fallen world.

* The Girl Scouts of the USA also add that, “it is okay to replace the word ‘God’ with whatever word your spiritual beliefs dictate.”

4. Should the master be expected to thank his servant for doing what he was told (or ordered or commanded) to do, for doing his duty? Should we expect thanks from God for obeying him and doing what he tells us to do? Doesn't our piety (being devout or reverent) earn us some special treatment?

No. Don't load this poor servant down with your 20th century baggage. That isn't the way he thinks in the 1st century. He understands that he is doing his duty. That's all. He doesn't deserve a reward for doing it, but he knows he'll be punished for neglecting or shirking his duty. To be true disciples we must dispense with an attitude of "entitlement" and instead see ourselves as "unworthy slaves."

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3. What is the only supplication (request) in the Lord's prayer that has a "catch" to it (that requires something of us)? (Matthew 6:12-15, Mark 11:25-26)

Matthew 6:12-15 – ¹²and forgive us our sins * as we have forgiven those who sin against us. ¹³And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴"If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

* Other translations: Debts, trespasses, wrongs

Mark 11:25 – ²⁵But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too. (Some manuscripts add verse 26), But if you refuse to forgive, your Father in heaven will not forgive your sins. (Verses above from New Living Translation, NLT)

4. In today's terms, roughly how much did the first servant owe the king? How much did the second servant owe the first?

A talent was a monetary unit worth about twenty years' wages for a laborer, so today it would be worth perhaps \$1 million.. A denarius was a day's wage for a laborer, today about \$100-200.

(Some of the above material is from the Jesus Walk Bible Study series by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson.
Web site: http://www.jesuswalk.com/lessons/17_7-10.htm)

5. In what ways has God shown mercy in forgiving your sins?

God's answers to prayers, rewards for walking in his ways, or punishments for not obeying his commands are not immediately obvious. In some (or many) cases they may not even be applied in your (human) lifetime. The "bad" guy gets the rewards, the "good" guy gets the problems and agonies. How often have you seen this happen? So in most cases, it's only by faith that you know your sins are forgiven when you repent and ask for God's forgiveness. You don't get a piece of paper like a Catholic indulgence of the 16th century saying "your XYZ sins are forgiven and you now have 20 fewer days to spend in purgatory."

God most definitely forgives our sins, but unfortunately you will probably have to wait for evidence of that until the final judgement.

6. If God is so willing to forgive us, why are we often unwilling to forgive others? Why is there such an attraction to revenge movies like *Kill Bill*, *Death Wish*, *Straw Dogs*, *Payback*, *The Crow*, *The Host*, and *Point Blank*?

Over the years, there have been some great stories of forgiveness—the French teacher who was repeatedly raped by Nazi soldiers comes to mind—but the popular theme in TV shows and movies is one of revenge and pay back. And how about the album, *God Forgives, I Don't* by rapper Rick Ross. Part of the attraction is to see the bad guy get his due, also a sense of fairness. We want to be the judge, jury, and executioner, and we want to see the outcome and not leave it up to the vagaries of God sometime in the distant future.

Here are some great verses about God's forgiveness:

- 1 John 1:9 – If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.
- Acts 3:19 – Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,
- Daniel 9:9 – The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.
- Psalm 103:12 – as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.
- Numbers 14:19-21 – "In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth,"
- Micah 7:18-19 – Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but

delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

- Matthew 26:28 – This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

7. Is it really possible to “forgive and forget?” How is it possible to forget the wrongs that others have done to us?

- Isaiah 43:25 – “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.”

- Hebrews 8:12 – For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

- Hebrews 10:17 – Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

8. What happened to the servant who was unforgiving? What is the parallel meaning for us today?