

SM032 – The Servant Who Would Not Forgive

You're listening to Stories of the Master.

The stories of Jesus have reached into the hearts of millions. They have changed people, families, and nations. Not all have loved the stories Jesus told. Not all have honored the life He lived. Some were angry with Him, the things He did and the things He said. Others were deeply moved and found hope. What will your response be?

Today on Stories of the Master, The Servant who Would Not Forgive. We begin in Matthew 17:22 and we will follow the story through Matthew 18. I hope you will follow along in your Bible.

My name is Jonathan, and I will be your Storyteller and Teacher.

I'm so glad you're here. Gather your friends. Come close and listen. It's time for the world to hear again the stories of the Master.

And now, The Servant Who Would Not Forgive.

SM032 – The Servant Who Would Not Forgive

Jesus had just healed a distressed father's young son. The young son had been demonized by an evil spirit and threatened to kill the young boy, but Jesus cast out the spirit and the boy was released. The father was overjoyed by his son's deliverance. The crowds were amazed by God's compassion through Jesus. The scribes were silenced by yet another display of power by this rabbi they did not trust.

But as Jesus and his disciples left the area and headed back to Capernaum, Jesus told them again the sober news. "I am going to Jerusalem. I will be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill me, and I will rise on the third day."

This was the third time Jesus had told them this in just a little over a week. It was important that they get it in their minds. He did not want them to be deceived by the crowds who were so impressed by the miracles. He wanted them to realize that in Jerusalem, he would be handed over to the authorities who would kill him, and he would rise again on the third day.

But the disciples did not understand. They did not understand how Jesus could rise on the third day and they did not understand why he would give himself up to the authorities and let them kill him. They were grieved at these words. They were confused and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Finally, they arrived in Capernaum. They passed by the toll booth where the temple tax was collected and one of the officials shouted out after them. "Hey, I've been looking for you! Your Jesus hasn't paid the temple tax yet." Peter walked up to them while Jesus and the others went into the home and the official said again. "I know you have been travelling, but Jesus is supposed to pay the temple tax. Doesn't he follow the laws?" And Peter, defensive for his master's reputation said, "Yes, he pays."

“Good – then go get the money and bring it back. And by the way, you owe money too!”

The Temple tax was an annual tax that every Jew was required to pay to maintain the Temple in Jerusalem. Sometimes, notable rabbis and religious leaders did not have to pay it. Evidently, to this tax collector, Jesus was not important enough to be exempt from it.

And so Peter went into the home to tell Jesus about this, but before he could say a word, Jesus said, “Simon, what do you think – when empires conquer new territories, who do their kings collect taxes from in that new territory – from their own sons who move in to rule, or from the people they have just conquered?”

And Peter said, “They always collect them from the people they have just conquered.”

And Jesus said, “Yes, that’s right. So, the king’s own sons don’t pay the taxes do they.” Jesus thought about the Temple tax. He thought about how His Father in heaven was the rightful King of the temple in Jerusalem. He thought about how he was the King’s Son and how he should be exempt from the tax. But so few knew this about his identity. Finally Jesus said, “Peter, we do not want to offend them. I want you to go fishing. Put a line in the lake and pull out the first fish. Open its mouth and you will find something in it for you and for me.”

And so Peter went to the lake. He had to pass by the tax booth and as he did the same collector yelled out at him, “Hey, where’s that money. You and your master still owe for the temple tax.”

“I know,” Peter said and off he went to the lake and when he caught the first fish he opened its mouth there was a coin in it. Peter was astonished. It was the exact amount that he and Jesus needed to pay!. How did Jesus know this fish had a coin in its mouth? But off he went to the toll booth with a big smile on his face and said, “Uh, about that temple tax? Is this enough? And he put the coin – the exact amount he and Jesus needed to pay – in front of the man with a big smile on his face.

“Where did you get that?”

“A fish gave it to me!” Peter said, and the tax collector just stared as Peter walked back to the house laughing. He could hardly wait to tell Jesus.

When he entered the home where they were staying, there was a discussion going on. Many other people besides the twelve disciples were there. Some families were there with their children and one of the disciples said, “Master, there are so many great people in the kingdom of God. Who is the greatest?”

Jesus called one of the young children over to him, he turned him around, had him face everyone and said to all of the guests who were present, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; ⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

⁷ “Woe to the world because of *its* stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

⁸ “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. ⁹ If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

¹⁰ “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

Jesus grew quiet. He was letting the people reflect on all that he had said. In these few words about children Jesus had turned the values of the world upside down. The kingdoms of the world valued power, but Jesus was holding forth those who were weak as being the greatest. The kingdoms of the world did everything in their might to make their kingdoms secure. But Jesus spoke of those who were most vulnerable, the children, as being the greatest. The world valued wisdom. Jesus spoke of simple, childlike trust as the qualities he was looking for. People like this were the greatest in the kingdom.

Jesus continued:

¹² “What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³ If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴ So it is not *the* will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

The people thought on the shepherds and sheep that were scattered throughout the land. They knew about people who had lost sheep. Sheep meant money and clothing and food for the shepherds and their families and when one sheep went astray they would search diligently to find it.

Is this the way God really was? Did he search for people the way a shepherd searched for sheep? Their hearts warmed at the thought of such a God who cared for his people in this way. Their hearts were comforted in the thought that God was different from the kings of the earth. God valued his people the way a parent valued a small child and a shepherd a wayward lamb.

Jesus was transforming the way his people thought about the world. He was shaping their mind to see the world the way God saw the world. He was shaping their thinking to become sons and daughters of the kingdom of God. But many obstacles stood in the way. One of the obstacles was the over emphasis of honor and doing everything to avoid shame in their culture.

When a man injured another man, the injured man, in order to save face and to save his respectability and family honor was expected to take revenge. But Jesus had taught earlier that they should not take revenge. He taught they should turn the other cheek, forgive, and pray for the other. It was time to teach this lesson again.

Jesus said, “If your brother sins against you. If he offends you and dishonors you, here is what you must do. You must go to him, and instead of taking revenge, you must seek to win him. Now, if he doesn’t listen to you, then, go and get one or two more. Lay out all the facts and seek to win him. But if he refuses to listen to your group, then, tell it to your community gathering, and let the whole community seek to win him. Now, if he refuses to listen to your community, then, let him be as an outsider like one of the tax collectors who are always trying to get our money.

They all laughed and Jesus continued, “Or, he can be like one of the gentiles. Truly I say to you, if two or three of you will agree on these things, I will be there with them in their midst.”

Jesus grew quiet and thought about the coming day when he by his Spirit would dwell in communities of followers all over the world who would live by these values that would turn the world upside down. Everyone was quiet as they were thinking on these words. Peter thought on the great message he had just heard – be humble like a child, God is a shepherd who seeks the lost, don’t take revenge but seek to win your brother who has insulted you. And even if they won’t be won and are like tax collectors and gentiles, well, had not Jesus reached out to a tax collector? He looked over at Matthew, the former tax collector who had been won by the love of Jesus. Peter thought on the the Gentiles that Jesus had loved – the Roman centurion, the possessed man of Gadara, the Canaanite woman whose daughter needed to be released from a spirit.

Peter was starting to get it. It was about forgiving, it was about reaching out, it was about mercy. Peter was inspired and he said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

Peter thought he was being generous. The rabbis of his day taught that people should forgive up to three times but Peter was doubling that and adding another on for good measure!

Jesus looked at Peter and laughed with joy and said, “No, not seven times. But I say to you seventy times seven.”

Everyone laughed with astonishment at this amazing statement where Jesus was telling his people to have abundant forgiveness toward those who dishonor them and then he said, “Let me tell you a story,” and when we come back we will hear the story of the Servant who refused to forgive.

Interlude

Hello everyone, this is Jonathan Williams, the creator of and storyteller for Stories of the Master. I’m sure Jesus loved times like the one he had on this day in which he was able to communicate so much about his kingdom.

And I hope we will take to heart what he said and realize these are more than nice stories to entertain us but Jesus is showing us, the sons and daughters of the kingdom, how we should live. We should be humble like children, we should be like shepherds who seek for the lost, we should not take revenge but forgive and seek to win the one who has offended us.

Our desire at Word of God, Speak and this broadcast, Stories of the Master, is to teach us how to live by the kingdom and advance the kingdom of God in a world that suffers from power and revenge.

I hope you will write to us at Stories of the Master and let us know how these stories are blessing your life. Write to us at PO Box 90047 in SA Texas 78209 in the U.S. and let us know about your relationship with Jesus. We would like to help you grow in your faith. Check out our website at StoriesoftheMaster.com and there you will find resources to help you in your discovery of Jesus and following him. You can listen to today's story again, download it, or purchase a CD for yourself and to share with friends. Again, our website is storiesofthemaster.com or you can write to us at Stories of the Master – PO Box 90047 in SA Texas, 78209.

And your tax-deductible gifts to this ministry help us to take the stories of Jesus all over the world to a world that desperately needs to hear the stories of the master.

Let's get back to our story now and hear Jesus' story about the servant who would not forgive.

Part 2

"Let me tell you a story," Jesus said.

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he had begun to settle *them*, one who owed him ten billion dollars was brought to him. ²⁵ But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell *to the ground* and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷ And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a thousand dollars; and he seized him and *began to choke him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell *to the ground* and *began to plead* with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'

³⁰ But the first servant was unwilling and ~~went and~~ threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹ Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to the king all that had happened. ³² Then summoning him, the king *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And the king, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

Jesus paused, and looked at everyone, and said, " My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

What a powerful story Jesus told and one that is so important for us to hear. But we need to understand the world in which Jesus lived. A Gentile king would have many financial ministers, governors, and tax collectors in his kingdom. These were the servants in the story. We must not think of the servants as lowly workers who were sweeping floors but as intelligent powerful men who helped the king

administrate his realm. Sometimes, these men would bid and pay for such positions for it could bring great wealth to them in their work. In their bid they would promise to deliver an annual sum to a king and the ones who received such positions would then go out and hire others to help them gain as much money as they could for the king.

But sometimes they did not make their goal because there were unforeseen circumstances such as drought and bad crops that would make it unreasonable and impossible to collect taxes for the king. The king would forgive debts and allow people and lands to recover so that revenue could be generated and taxes paid.

In the story, it was time for the king to call in his financial administrators so they could give an account of their work to him and one servant was in deep trouble. He had not fulfilled anything close to what the king wanted. In order to dramatize the deep trouble in which this servant found himself, Jesus said the servant owed the king 10,000 talents.

When Jesus said this, everyone must have laughed and hollered and yelled with delight and fun for they knew Jesus was exaggerating the debt in order to drive an important point home. A talent, in weight, was the heaviest weight, 65 to 95 pounds and in monetary value one talent equaled 10,000 days worth of work. So, in the story, the servant owed the king the equivalent of 100 million days wages. To put this in perspective in the year 4 BC, a tax was levied against the entire nation of Israel – all of Galilee, all of Samaria, and all of Judea and the amount was 600 talents. This servant owed 10,000 talents and he would have to work 250,000 years to pay off his debt!

Yes, he was in deep trouble! Kings at that time were ruthless – their word was the law and so the king, a tyrant, ordered that this man and his wife and children be sold into slavery and that the payment be made to him. He wouldn't get the debt paid but at least he would get something.

But the servant fell on his face before the king and pleaded for mercy and the king forgave the debt and let the servant go. Perhaps he would learn his lesson and go out and do a better job.

But, as you know from the story, this servant went out, found a fellow worker who owed him some money, yes, but nothing compared to the debt of the first servant and he demanded that this man pay him back and when that servant fell *to the ground* and *began* to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you,' using the same words the first servant used, the first servant said, "No! I refuse, and he threw him in jail.

Well, when the king heard about this, he was offended. He had mercy upon the first servant but the first servant did not have mercy on his fellow servant plus, by throwing him into jail, the second servant would not be able to work for the king. How could he work for the king when he was in jail for a debt owed to a fellow servant? That's why the king did not throw the first servant in jail. What good would it do him? But when the first servant threw the second servant into jail, he was showing disloyalty to the king by locking up one of the king's servants so that the king would get nothing from him.

And so the king called the first servant back in and said, “You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ And the king, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.”

The room must have become very quiet when Jesus told this story. They all knew why Jesus told it. Jesus had been teaching about the kingdom of God. The greatest in the kingdom was like a little child. The God of the kingdom was like a faithful shepherd seeking his lost sheep. The people of the kingdom were not to take revenge but were to forgive and even attempt to win their brothers who had offended their honor and dignity.

And why were they to forgive and to seek to win? Because the King of heaven and earth has done that to us. We are like the first servant with a debt before God that is too big to pay. We are like the first servant who owes billions upon billions and who does not have enough lifetimes to pay off the debt. We are totally at the king’s mercy and if the first servant did anything right it was this – he fell on his face before the king and pleaded for mercy.

And you and I must do the same. We have sinned against God. Our sins are greater than any of us know. If God were to show us all of our sin, we would be on our faces in despair, depression, and desperation. And that is the place all of us must take, some day, before the king.

I have some good news for you. The king will have compassion upon us and forgive us.

And because he has compassion upon us, we must have compassion upon others who sin against us. Yes, when others sin against us it is painful. Sometimes the sins of others against us are tragic and heartbreaking. And it can be hard to forgive – it can be the hardest thing on earth to do. But if we do not forgive, we will find ourselves in a spiritual and emotional prison where we are tortured by the poison of bitterness.

Will you forgive others for their offenses against you? ~~Will you join in the celebration of God’s forgiveness or will you remain outside the place of feasting?~~ Here’s what you can do today.

Write the following on a piece of paper, the person’s name and the fact that they have sinned against you. You need not list all the sins. But identify the person. Then, tear up the paper and throw it away or burn it. As you destroy it, pray this:

“Father, you have forgiven me of so much. I now choose to forgive _____ for his/her sins against me. If I have any physical sickness coming from this I ask you to heal me in Jesus name. If I am in “jail” in any way because of my lack of forgiveness I ask you to release me from jail. I want to live in the freedom that you offer.”

Did you pray that? May God bless you as you obey Him and extend forgiveness to others as He has extended it to you. Here are three steps to help you as you give the gift of forgiveness to others.

First, pray regularly for the person you are forgiving. You may have forgiven him, but he may still have bad habits. Pray for God to help him get right with Him.

Second, ask God to fill you with love for that person even if he has not turned away from bad or destructive habits. When he turns back to God, you will be ready to embrace him like a shepherd embracing a lost lamb.

Third, if you are tempted to act upon the memories of those who have offended you, remind yourself, "I gave that up. I burned those offenses. I threw them away and no longer hold them against that person. I have given this to God and I will not dwell on it or bring it up."

If you cannot take these steps, then you must seek forgiveness for the sin of bitterness and healing from the pain in your life so that you can become healthy and offer forgiveness to those who need it.

Forgiveness may be the hardest gift to give, but it is a gift we must extend to others.

This is the story of the Servant who would not forgive. Is it your story? Or are you living by the power of King Jesus who says the greatest is a child, who is like a shepherd seeking lost sheep, who tells us not to seek revenge but seek to win those who have offended us, and who shares a story of forgiveness.

Ending

Quite a story, isn't it. You know, friends, in all my years of talking with people about Jesus, one of the saddest sights is people who are consumed by bitterness. But one of the most joyful sights is to see people released from bitterness and who step into the freedom of forgiving others. Do you need to forgive someone today? I want to mention a resource to you to help you take this step. It is my little book on forgiveness called *The Prodigal Son and His Prodigal Father*. I hope you will order it today and learn about God's forgiveness, about forgiving one another, and about forgiving ourselves. Just go to our website, storiesofthemaster.com and click on the resources tab and you will find it.

Stories of the Master is a ministry of Word of God, Speak. Write to us and let us know how these stories are blessing your life. You can write to us at PO Box 90047 in San Antonio Texas 78209 in the U.S. or you can email us at stories@storiesofthemaster.com. Check out our website at storiesofthemaster.com and there you will find resources, CDs and books to help you in your discovery of Jesus including the book on forgiveness called *The Prodigal Son and His Prodigal Father*. I hope you will get one today.

Our desire is to take the stories of Jesus around the world. Your tax deductible gifts help us to do this and we appreciate your financial help that enables others to hear of the power and the glory of Jesus who had died and risen again that he might be the Savior of our sins and the Lord of our life.

I hope you have been blessed by today's story. And I hope that you will join us again for another Story of the Master. Until then, may the Master Himself richly bless you.